

FOLIO 4

Conservation in Marine & Coastal Areas

Hudson Bay, Canada. Photo: Sydney Walsh/ Audubon

Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) established the goal of effectively conserving and managing 30 percent of lands, waters, and seas by 2030 (“30x30”, or [Target 3](#)). This series of Audubon briefs features practical, action-oriented options for reaching the 30x30 target through a variety of approaches that deliver benefits for biodiversity, communities, and the climate.

Marine and Coastal Areas

Oceans cover more than 71 percent of the globe, connecting over 1.6 million kilometers of coastal areas where land and sea meet. These coastlines are also where much of human life and economic activity is concentrated: more than 40 percent of the world’s population lives in coastal areas, supporting major economic engines ranging from fishing to shipping to tourism.

The prosperity of these communities is closely tied to the health of the ecosystems around them. Coastal and marine ecosystems serve as fish nurseries and seabird habitat, while coastal vegetation provides a natural barrier against extreme weather and high tides. But these ecosystems are under growing pressure. Only around 15 percent of the world’s coastal ecosystems remain intact, while development and exploration are increasingly affecting marine areas – even in the high seas.

Opportunity

Implementing long-term conservation and management measures in marine and coastal areas is a core component of CBD’s [Target 3](#), which includes the goal of effectively conserving and managing 30 percent of inland waters and seas by 2030. Marine protected areas and Other Effective Conservation Measures (OECMs) currently cover around [10 percent](#) of the ocean. There is a significant opportunity to enhance the effective conservation and management of marine and coastal areas – not only through the establishment of new coastal and [marine protected areas](#), but also through other conservation approaches that support the resilience of local communities and economies even as they protect biodiversity and combat climate change. The examples below explore different approaches to effectively conserving and managing a diversity of marine and coastal areas.

Case Studies

Hudson and James Bays, Canada

Hudson and James Bays in Canada collectively represent the world's largest inland sea by surface area. Along their western shores, the Hudson Bay Lowlands encompasses the second largest peatland complex in the world, part of an extraordinary landscape where Arctic marine waters meet the wetlands and peatlands of the Boreal. This convergence provides critical habitat for a wealth of species: at least 175 species of birds and 60 species of fish rely on the area for some portion of their annual cycle, while polar bears, beluga whales, ringed seals, and arctic walrus all call it home.

This region comprises the traditional marine territories of seven First Nation communities: Weenusk, Attawapiskat, Chapleau Cree, Fort Albany, Kashechewan, Missanabie Cree, Moose Cree, and Taykwa Tagamou. Together as the Mushkegowuk Council, they are leading an initiative to protect this globally important area as the 86,000-square-kilometer Mushkegowuk National Marine Conservation Area. An example of Indigenous-led conservation, the proposed marine conservation area would stretch from southwestern Hudson Bay to western James Bay, protecting cultural heritage and critical habitat for birds and other wildlife. while building resilience for generations to come.



Hudson Bay, Canada
Photo: Sydney
Walsh/ Audubon



Salt Marsh on Maryland's
Eastern Shore
Photo: Sydney Walsh/
Audubon

Maryland Salt Marshes, United States

Along Maryland's coastal bays and Chesapeake Bay, approximately 69,000 hectares of salt and brackish tidal marshes provide a critical connection between land and water. These marshes serve as nurseries that support the state's \$1.8 billion commercial fisheries industry and provide a backdrop for a \$14 billion outdoor recreation and tourism industry. They also buffer local communities from the impact of coastal storms that increasingly ravage the region—a service valued at more than \$600 million—and lock carbon and methane into their soils. For wildlife, these marshes provide habitat for a myriad of species including at least three bird species considered among those of highest conservation concern by the IUCN.

Centuries of drainage and conversion for agriculture and industry, combined with growing coastal development and rising seas, have put these ecosystems under increasing pressure.

Audubon's Marshes for Tomorrow program developed a restoration plan that brings together a unique set of partners, including federal and state agencies, municipal officials, Indigenous leaders, local communities, commercial actors, and conservation organizations. The initiative aims to maintain at least 10,117 hectares of salt marsh in the long term through restoration efforts and conservation strategies developed with the support of local communities.

By helping marshes persist as conditions change, these efforts can reduce the impacts of sea level rise, protect the habitat of species like the Saltmarsh Sparrow, and sustain the economic and community benefits healthy marshes provide. As a different model of effective conservation, Marshes for Tomorrow demonstrates how broad partnerships can protect biodiversity while supporting resilient coastal communities and economies.



Rocuant-Andalién Wetland, Chile.
Photo: Katherine Sanhueza Bravo

Rocuant-Andalién Wetland, Chile

Concepción, Chile's second-largest city, sits within a complex of wetlands spanning more than 28.5 kilometers. The Rocuant-Andalién-Vasco Da Gama-Paicaví-Tucapel Bajo Wetland System includes marshes, swamps, riparian zones, and estuaries stretching to the Pacific Coast. Together, these habitats supports more than 150 bird species as well as a wealth of other wildlife, earning the area designation as an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area. The wetlands also provide a natural defense for the people who live among them, absorbing rainfall and storm surges and serving as a natural buffer against floods.

But industrial expansion, urban development, and pollution have significantly degraded and shrunk these wetlands, weakening that natural protection and leaving local communities at increased risk from floods. In 2019, a coalition of regional municipalities succeeded in having the wetland system declared a

priority site for conservation, promoting protective measures while allowing for continued development. Portions of the system are also protected under Chile's national urban wetlands law.

Now, an initiative supported by the [Americas Flyways Initiative](#)—a collaboration between Audubon, BirdLife International, and the Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean—is working with community organizations to conserve and restore the Rocuant-Andalién wetlands. By restoring the wetlands' ability to absorb rainwater and storm surges while increasing connectivity and conservation at sites crucial to migratory birds, the initiative can benefit both people and nature. This restored natural infrastructure will also strengthen the resilience of Concepción, surrounding communities, and crucial infrastructure, like the port and airport, as climate change increases the likely risk of more frequent and intense flooding.

Previous policy briefs: We invite you to read the previous policy briefs on [Indigenous-led protected areas](#), [conservation on working lands](#), and [subnational protected areas](#).

Contact: For more information, or to request future policy briefs, please contact Christine.dragisic@audubon.org